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ABSTRACT

The frequent occurrences of athletic scandals in colleges and universities prompted a study whose purpose was to examine faculty opinions about athletes at schools which compete at Division 1-A NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) schools. Specifically, the study sought to: (1) describe the opinions of academic faculty members of Division 1-A schools toward athletes; and (2) determine if a relationship exists between these faculty opinions and the quality of academic support student athletes receive at their respective institutions. Also, the study attempted to investigate the frequency and types of attempts to influence students athletes' grades. Eighteen institutions were selected and 1,350 faculty were given a 46-item questionnaire to assess their opinions; response rates ranged from 29% to 71%. The results showed that faculty largely rejected a major role in the academic welfare of athletes and were resolute in resisting pressure to provide special academic benefits. Though faculty appeared to believe they do have influence, evidence from the study indicated no apparent impact of faculty opinion on academic assistance for athletes at the institutions surveyed. Contains five references. (GLR)

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An Investigation of Faculty Perceptions of Athletics at Division 1A Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the preceptions of faculty about the formation and execution of academic policies covering student athletes. Randomly selected faculty at 18 Division 1A schools appeared indifferent toward athletics in general and indicated low levels of confidence in school leaders regarding athletic decisions. Faculty largely rejected a major role in the academic welfare of athletes but were resolute in resisting pressure to provide special academic benefits. Though faculty appeared to believe they do have influence, evidence from this study indicates no apparent impact of faculty opinion on academic assistance for athletes at these institutions.

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College athletics continue to be scandalized by cheating despite repeated attempts by the NCAA and the Presidents' Association to control exploitation and restore an academic theme to intercollegiate sport competition. Several explanations are given for the seeming inability of the collegiate sport establishment to institute and maintain programs which ensure fair competition and academic integrity. Perhaps the most popular of these is that the institutions do not care about athletes beyond the financial gain their performances may generate (e.g., Cramer, 1986). Thus, schools make athletic participation possible for non-functional students by keeping them eligible through courses which do not fulfill degree requirements (Adler & Adler, 1985). A second frequent explanation for the plague of scandals is that the institutions' structures and leaders are corrupt and/or ineffective (e.g., Gilley & Hickey, 1985). From this perspective, governing boards and alumni boosters are so powerful that they effectively overwhelm the sensitivities and purposes of the college in order to promote athletic success at any cost. Thus a logical conclusion would be that most of the reforms proposed by organizations such as the NCAA and the institutions themselves are largely for show and not meant to challenge the "system" (Lederman, 1987).

A largely ignored factor in these explanations is the impact of the faculty on decisions about athletic goals and policies. When scandal strikes, two reactions appear predictable. First, presidents will solemnly proclaim that they have no knowledge of the violations and that, as an intellectual community, all (including the faculty) bear responsibility. Second, almost immediately faculty organizations will declare impotence in matters athletic, denounce the administration and call for reform. However, the

actual extent to which faculty opinions do influence decisions made about the academic welfare of collegiate athletes is largely unknown. It could be, for example, that a third explanation for athletic scandals is that faculty opinion forces academic and athletic administrators to pursue high profile, expensive athletic programs.

The purpose of this study was to examine faculty opinions about athletes at schools which compete at Division 1-A NCAA schools. Specifically, we sought to:

1. Describe the opinions of academic faculty members of Division 1-A schools toward athletics, and
2. Determine if a relationship existed between these faculty opinions and the quality of academic support student athletes receive at their respective institutions.

Also, because the popular press contains sometimes sensational accounts of attempts to influence faculty by athletic departments (e.g. the "Kemp" and "Valvano" cases), we investigated the frequency and types of attempts to influence students athletes' grades.

METHOD

Selection of Institutions

From 104 universities classified by the NCAA as Division 1A, 18 were selected to be target institutions for this study. The selection of these 18 institutions was based on a study of all Division 1A institutions conducted by Sherman, Weber and Tegano (1986). Sherman et al. (1986) surveyed athletic directors asking them to name the programs with the "best" academic assistance programs for student athletes. The results yielded three categories of schools: those mentioned frequently (6), those mentioned but less frequently (42), and those not mentioned at all (56). Using these categories we

created a stratified sample which contained six institutions randomly selected from the 42 mentioned schools and six randomly selected from the 56 schools not mentioned. The remaining six schools were all those frequently mentioned in Sherman, et al. (1986).

Selection of Faculty

From each of these 18 schools, 75 faculty were selected using the most current institution catalog or faculty listing. A table of random numbers was used to identify pages within these documents from which faculty were then selected by random number counting from the top left of the page.

We reasoned that there were two benefits from using a stratified sample. First, Sherman et al. (1986) indicated that relatively clear differences did exist between the quality of academic assistance offered athletes. Thus, this sampling strategy ensured that this dimension would be represented in the sample. Second, categorizing faculty responses by quality of academic assistance offered athletes would make possible a comparison of faculty opinions between these categories. This comparison, we believed, may indicate the extent to which faculty opinions correspond to the quality of academic assistance to athletes. If faculty opinions were essentially equal across this dimension, it may imply that these programs are based on considerations other than faculty wishes.

The Questionnaire

A 46 item questionnaire was developed to assess faculty opinions. Twelve of the items solicited descriptive information such as gender, academic field, faculty status and participation in sports. A second group of 34 items asked responders to indicate their

agreement or disagreement using a four key (1 = Agree, 2 = Tend to Agree, 3 = Tend to Disagree, 4 = Disagree) Likert scale. These items addressed a variety of issues drawn from two sources: topics frequently appearing in literature and interviews with faculty. These items addressed faculty perceptions of the role of student athletes, the types of academic assistance they should be provided, the role of athletics in their institution, and the frequency and types of pressure to assist athletes. To construct this questionnaire, initially, items were constructed which addressed the issues and informally tested by asking faculty to judge the clarity and intention of the items and also to suggest additional issues or questions. Based on the results of this informal field test, items were revised and submitted for additional review by faculty to judge clarity and intention. The final questionnaire was revised using feedback received and then submitted to a group of faculty for a last review. Based on these reviews, it appeared that the items were clearly written and that the purposes of the items were apparent.

Procedure

The questionnaire was mailed to 1,350 faculty at the 18 institutions. A mailing with a follow-up reminder card and a second mailing to non-responders with a follow-up card produced a response rate of 55% (52% useable). The response rates were balanced between schools in the three categories ("frequently mentioned" = 50%; "mentioned" = 52%; "not mentioned" = 54%). By institution, response rates ranged from 29% to 71%.

Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed in four ways. First, response frequencies were tabulated and average response scores generated. Second, a table of intercorrelations between items was constructed using Pearson r. Third, a principal component factor analysis employing Varimax rotation specifying three, five and seven factor solutions was conducted. Finally, significance tests were conducted between factor scores and selected descriptor variables using Chi-square. In this report, the results presented include all significant and important outcomes.

RESULTS

The factor analysis yielded three factors (see Tables 1, 2, 3):

- Factor I was interpreted as indicating a "general" attitude toward athletics. Twelve items loaded on Factor I. This factor accounted for 32.9 percent of the explained variance.
- Factor II was identified as an "advising responsibility" function. Nine items loaded on Factor II. This factor accounted for 21.9 percent of the explained variance.
- Factor III was interpreted as indicating a "role" for football at the university. Four items loaded on Factor III. This factor accounted for 13.6 percent of the explained variance.

The "general attitude" of the faculty toward athletics (Factor I) was mixed. A majority of faculty indicated they felt major sports are an important aspect of the educational program and that major sports play an important role at their institutions. Faculty also expressed a strong belief (74%) that they have a voice in decisions about sports but less than a majority (44%) believed that the central administration provided good leadership for sports. On the other hand, about one-third of the faculty thought

that student athletes were exploited by the athletic department (37%) and the institution (31%). Only 29% thought coaches encouraged student-athletes to achieve academically. Sixty-five percent of faculty believed that student athletes are not as successful academically as other students even though a majority (55%) indicated they felt athletes received benefits other students did not. Sixteen percent thought that academic records were altered to secure admission of athletes, and about one-fifth of the faculty opined that major sports should be abandoned at their institution. Thus, it appears that, though there is general support for athletics, the faculty indicated considerable suspicion regarding the honesty and intentions of athletic and college administrators. In Table 1, the questionnaire items loading on Factor I, the factor loadings and the percent of faculty agreeing with item is presented.

Regarding advising responsibility (Factor II), a high percentage (65%) of the respondents indicated that student athletes should be provided with specialized advising or academic assistance. The groups mentioned frequently were the athletic departments (69%), interested faculty (53%), and specially trained advisors (52%), although a majority (54%) also indicated that they thought university academic administrators had a responsibility to provide advising for athletes. A lower number of respondents thought it was a faculty (37%) or administration (36%) responsibility to assure that athletes meet graduation requirements; a majority of faculty (59%) indicated this was the athletic department's responsibility. Faculty responses indicate a belief that athletes should receive their academic advising through means different from other students. In addition, faculty appear to believe they are <u>not</u> responsible for athletes graduating. In

Table 2, the questionnaire items loading on Factor II, the factor loadings and the percent of faulty agreeing with each item is presented.

Faculty opinion about the "role" of football indicated that the primary purpose was to provide public entertainment (83%), followed closely by to build school spirit (82%) and to promote (80%) the university. A majority (69%) also felt that athletics served the role of generating revenue. In Table 3, the questionnaire items loading on Factor III, the factor loadings and the percent of faculty agreeing with each item is presented.

One objective of this study was to investigate the influence of faculty attitudes about sports on decisions about athletic programs, such as the quality of academic support provided to athletes. Our findings indicated that there was no meaningful association between the quality of academic assistance programs provided by the three categories of institutions and any of the responses on the questionnaire. In Table 4 are reported Pearson product moment correlation coefficients for selected items on the questionnaire. The correlations reported in Table 4 were the highest obtained, none of which exceed ± .10. Thus, regardless of whether the faculty came from schools that were frequently recognized for the quality of academic assistance they provided student athletes, their opinions about athletics and the academic assistance and advice which should be provided to athletes were similar.

Additional analysis of demographic variables and attitudes expressed on the questionnaire items revealed that attitudes about athletes were not affected by the gender of the responders, by their academic rank or academic area (i.e., quantitative science, social studies and humanities, professional training), by the highest academic

degree earned, by years of service at their current institution, by whether they teach or advise student athletes or by whether they were a varsity athlete in high school or college. However, two significant associations were discovered. First, differences in faculty attitudes toward sports were associated with attendance at athletic events. Faculty who reported they regularly attended athletic events, or "fans," expressed significantly more positive opinions about sports (Chi square = 136.2; $p < .01$). Second, faculty who personally felt pressure to help student athletes in classes had a significantly higher negative attitude about athletics. Seventy-four responders (11%) reported having had pressure exerted on them to help student athletes. Of the 74, only 7% had a highly favorable attitude toward athletics (Chi square = 38.03; $p < .01$). The relationship between reported attempts to influence faculty and negative attitudes was found to exist even for faculty who were "fans." That is, faculty "fans" who reported feeling pressure to alter grades had negative attitudes also. Though faculty reported a wide variety of ways to exert influence, the frequency of these attempts was considered low.

CONCLUSIONS

Three main conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, faculty appear to perceive athletics as an important but not essential component of higher education; however, it is a component which they do not completely trust in terms of administration and purpose. Second, faculty appeared to believe that athletic personnel should assume primary responsibility for assisting athletes achieve academic success. Finally, faculty appeared to believe that their opinions counted in decisions about the

relation between athletics and academics. The last of these opinions appears inconsistent with the data. That is, faculty opinions about athletics were the same across all three categories of institutions despite evidence that the emphasis on academics in athletics varied widely. We interpret this as an indication that faculty attitudes and opinions have relatively little influence on athletic program decisions about the importance given to academics in these programs.

It appears from these data that if faculty wish to influence decisions about collegiate athletics several changes may be necessary. First, it will be necessary to recognize that, currently, faculty opinion appears to have little impact. Second, faculty will probably have to develop more extensive and effective ways to influence decisions about policies governing academic and athletic policies. Third, it may be necessary for faculty to assume more control over athletes' academic lives. At present, it appears that faculty largely believe that academic advising of athletes should be delegated to athletic personnel.

Finally, these data generate a strong endorsement of faculty integrity regarding attempts to influence evaluations of student performance in the classroom. Faculty reported consistently rejecting attempts to influence their student evaluations, expressed strong negative attitudes toward such attempts and indicated enduring negative opinions of those requesting academic favors.

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Table 1

Faculty Attitudes Toward Athletes

Questionnaire Item	Factor Loadings	% of Faculty Agreeing
Major sports play an important role in meeting their institution's mission.	.52853	55%
Faculty has a voice in decisions about major-sport athletics.	.45661	74%
The central administration provides good leadership for major-sport athletics.	.60273	44%
A primary role of varsity football is that it represents one aspect of the educational process.	.42746	62%
Coaches encourage students to achieve academically.	.60562	29%
Student athletes are not as successful academically as other students.	.60451	65%
Student athletes are exploited by their athletic department.	.75212	37%
Student athletes are exploited by their institution.	.74261	31%
Student athletes receive benefits in their academic careers that others do not.	.64754	55%
Transcripts are tampered with in order to admit student athletes.	.61282	16%
Faculty are pressured to help student athletes in their classes at this institution.	.58328	12%
Major sports should be abandoned at their institution.	.67981	18%

Table 2

Faculty Attitudes About Advising Student Athletes

Questionnaire Item	Factor Loadings	% of Faculty Agreeing
Student athletes should be provided with specialized academic assistance and/or advising programs.	.54551	65%
Athletic departments should provide academic advising for student athletes.	.40591	69%
University academic administrators should provide academic advising for student athletes.	.51468	54%
Interested faculty should provide academic advising for student athletes.	.38896	53%
Specially trained academic advisors should provide academic advising for student athletes	.55627	52%
Some university agency should have the responsibility to see that marginal student athletes graduate.	.55969	68%
It is the athletic department's responsibility to assure that the student athletes meet graduation requirements.	.62937	59%
It is the faculty's responsibility to assure that student athletes meet graduation requirements.	.56081	37%
It is the university administration's responsibility to assure that student athletes meet graduation requirements.	.70389	36%

Table 3

Faculty Attitudes Regarding the Role of Varsity Football

Questionnaire Item	Factor Loadings	% of Faculty Agreeing
A primary role of varsity football is public entertainment.	.67186	83%
A primary role of varsity football is to build school spirit.	.42025	82%
A primary role of varsity football is to promote the university.	.58358	80%
A primary role of varsity football is to build revenue.	.68203	69%

Table 4

Correlations between
Three Categories of Schools and Faculty Attitudes Toward Athletes

Attitude Item	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
Additional help should be given student athletes.	-.10
Student athletes should be provided specialized academic assistance.	.08
A primary role of varsity football is to build school spirit.	.08
Major sport athletics should be abandoned at my institution.	-.08
A primary role of varsity football is to build revenue.	.07
The faculty has a voice in decisions about major sport athletics.	.06
A primary role of varsity football is to promote physical fitness.	.06
Student athletes are discriminated against in the classroom.	-.06
The central administration provides effective and appropriate leadership for major sport athletes.	-.06
I have felt personal pressure to help student athletes in my classes.	-.06
It is the responsibility of the university faculty for assuring the student athletes meet graduation requirements.	.05
A primary role of varsity football is public entertainment.	.05
Interested faculty should provide academic advising for student athletes.	-.05
Athletic departments should provide academic advising for student athletes.	-.05
A primary role of varsity football is to promote the university.	-.05
Faculty members are pressured to help student athletes in their classes at my university.	-.04

END

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